

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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****BILL SUMMARY INCLUDED**

LAWMAKERS INTRODUCE BI-PARTISAN HEALTH IT BILL

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Today, legislation put forth by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and colleagues, Senators Mike Enzi, Hillary Clinton and Orrin Hatch to modernize health care for the 21st century successfully was introduced in the United States Senate. Patient care declines in quality when physicians do not have access to timely information about the patients they serve and health care costs skyrocket when tests or procedures are duplicated because critical records are missing or inaccessible. Wasting scarce health care dollars on needless administrative costs drives up insurance premiums, and means that care is less affordable and less available. The Wired for Health Care Quality Act of 2007 sets forth the goal posts for improving health care through technology, reducing administrative costs and diminishing fatal errors caused by lack of information.

Senator Kennedy said, "We have a responsibility to make the miracles of modern medicine available to every American. However, in our health care system, medical errors are all too common and coordination of care is often poor. Rising costs are crushing our health care system."

Senator Enzi said, "Time is of the essence – without uniform standards, the industry is moving forward in a fragmented and disjointed direction. By passing this bill, we can establish an interconnected, nationwide health technology system to improve the quality of care in this country. This bill will eliminate duplicative tests and reduce medical errors. Moving from a paper-based health care system to secure electronic medical records will save lives and reduce skyrocketing health care costs."

Senator Clinton said, "Americans are blessed with access to the most advanced medical care in the world, but burdened with a healthcare system that is plagued by medical errors, wasteful duplication and other inefficiencies that jeopardize patient safety and contribute to skyrocketing healthcare costs. Harnessing the power of health information technology will help make our healthcare system more efficient, more effective and help make sure precious health care dollars are used wisely."

Senator Hatch said, "We're facing a Tower of Babel in health care," Hatch said. "If we don't act, we'll soon have completely different standards for publicly and privately insured patients. That will seriously impair the improvements in care that we all want to see through the use of health information technology. We simply can't miss this chance."

IT systems are linked securely and with strong privacy protections to a patient's medical records and can improve care by warning a doctor or nurse if an order or prescription may harm a patient. These systems can issue reminders for screening tests, so that needed preventive care is not overlooked. Computerized records also allow doctors to look at a patient's entire medical record at once, improving care coordination in our fragmented health care system.

The savings from better IT use are enormous. The Federal government's estimate is that the

nation would save \$140 billion each year from proper IT use. These savings from health IT could cut the cost of a family's insurance policy by over \$700—which equates to approximately a month of free health care. Despite the benefits of investment in health IT, utilization is low. The Wired for Health Care Quality Act of 2007 will give health care providers the assistance they need to invest in lifesaving health IT.

The Wired for Health Care Quality Act

Information technology is transforming all aspects of our modern society, but adoption of IT within health care has progressed slowly. IT systems linked securely and with strong privacy protections to patients' medical records can improve the quality and efficiency of care while producing significant cost savings. Despite the potential benefits of health IT, investment and adoption has been limited, particularly among smaller providers who are most affected by the financial cost of implementing a health IT system. The Wired for Health Care Quality Act would give health care providers the assistance they need to invest in lifesaving health IT.

The legislation encourages the development of standards for health IT through:

- Codifying the role of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology in coordinating the policies of federal agencies regarding health IT.
- Establishing a public–private partnership known as the Partnership for Health Care Improvement to provide recommendations to the Secretary with regard to technical aspects of interoperability, standards, implementation specifications, and certification criteria for the exchange of health information. The National Coordinator will serve as a liaison to the Partnership. The legislation also requires the Secretary to publish a schedule for assessment of standards for significant use cases after consulting with the Partnership.
- Requiring all Federal IT purchases conform to the standards recommended by the Partnership and adopted by the President. Adoption of these standards is voluntary for private entities.
- Establishing the American Health Information Community as a body providing recommendations to the Secretary regarding policies to promote the development of a nationwide interoperable health information technology infrastructure. These include recommendations regarding patient privacy, information security, and appropriate uses of health information.

The legislation assures strong privacy protections for electronic health information by:

- Requiring that the national strategy on health IT includes strong privacy protections, including methods to notify patients if their medical information is wrongfully disclosed.

The legislation encourages the adoption of qualified health IT to improve the quality and efficiency of care by:

- Providing grants for the purchase of health IT systems to providers demonstrating financial need.
- Providing grants to states to establish low interest loan programs to help providers acquire health IT systems that will improve the quality and efficiency of health care.
- Providing grants to facilitate the implementation of regional or local health information plans to improve health care quality and efficiency through the electronic exchange of health information

The legislation will help providers use IT to improve quality by:

- Providing grants to integrate qualified health IT in the clinical education of health professionals and encourage the use of decision support software to reduce medical errors.
- Requiring the Secretary to designate a single organization to develop healthcare performance measures.
- Establishing a Health Information Technology Resource Center where IT users can learn from the previous experience of others who have implemented qualified health IT.

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